



Midnight Flight (Broken Wings Book 2)

By V.C. Andrews

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THEY LIVED ON THE WILD SIDE.

NOW THESE BAD GIRLS ARE PAYING THE PRICE.

At Dr. Foreman's School for Girls, the "students" sleep in barns, work on a farm in the blazing heat, and are subjected to ruthless guards who watch their every move. It's an institution run by the dreadful Dr. Foreman, a woman who delights in administering the worst form of punishment -- the mysterious Ice Room where the girls face their darkest fears.

Now Phoebe, Teal, and Robin -- three girls from very different worlds -- are the newcomers in this desert hell. During their stay, each girl will be tempted to commit the ultimate crime of betrayal as Dr. Foreman cleverly tries to turn them against each other -- until they learn that the only way to survive is to stick together...and fight back.

THESE TOUGH GIRLS NEVER MET THEIR MATCH -- UNTIL THEY MET EACH OTHER.

Phoebe

No one will hear her cries now.

They put the helmet over my head and fastened the straps so that it was on tightly. I resisted but I couldn't keep my arms from being straightened and then a strap was fixed over my chest. It was just as it had been when I woke up in the plane that brought me to this hell.

Robin

She wants to break free -- but where will she fly?

I'm going to strangle my mother darling when I get away from here. She just wanted to get me out of her hair while she tries to become a famous country singing star. Just go, she told me, I'm better off. What she really meant was she was better off.

Teal

Once she was rich and entitled -- now she's just trying to survive.

Don't you want to try to run away with me? You can't want to stay here a moment

longer than you have to. Maybe we just have to follow the dirt road out. Maybe they're lying to us and we're not that far from a town. I won't make it through another day like this.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

One of the most popular authors of all time, V.C. Andrews has been a bestselling phenomenon since the publication of *Flowers in the Attic*, first in the renowned Dollanganger family series which includes *Petals on the Wind*, *If There Be Thorns*, *Seeds of Yesterday*, and *Garden of Shadows*. The family saga continues with *Christopher's Diary: Secrets of Foxworth*, *Christopher's Diary: Echoes of Dollanganger*, and *Secret Brother*. V.C. Andrews has written more than seventy novels, which have sold more than 106 million copies worldwide and been translated into twenty five foreign languages. Join the conversation about the world of V.C. Andrews at [Facebook.com/OfficialVCAndrews](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialVCAndrews).

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Chapter 1: Orientation

The moment we were alone, I turned to the girl on my left.

"What is this? Where are we? Why are we in this place?" I asked.

"Why are you asking me? How would I know?" she shot back at me. "What do I look like, information please?"

"Well, you were here before me so I thought you might know more," I threw back at her with just as unfriendly a tone.

"We got here only a little while before you did," the second girl said, somewhat softer. I turned to her. "So we don't know any more than you do. I'm Teal Sommers. That's Robin Lyn Taylor. She didn't tell me her name," Teal added with a smirk. "I heard one of those girls call her that." She leaned forward to glare past me at Robin Lyn.

"I'm not exactly in a party mood, you know, and I told you, I don't like to be called Robin Lyn. Just call me Robin. You, too," she ordered me.

"Yes, Your Majesty," I said, and Teal laughed.

Robin folded her arms and turned away. "Well, we're here together so I guess we'll have to talk to each other decently. Where y'all from?"

"Where y'all from?" Teal laughed. "I'm from Albany, New York. I was flown in here just a little before y'all were, I think. I'm very unsure about the time. They took my watch."

"Mine, too," I said, rubbing my wrist. "And my ring. Why did they do that?"

"Maybe they're jewel thieves. They took Robin's watch, too, right, Robin?"

"Big deal. I stole it. I'll steal another first chance I get," she said defiantly, looking at the closed door. "I'm supposed to be at a school, a special school. That's what the judge said," she shouted at the door. "Not some dumpy, smelly building."

"Judge?" I asked.

She spun her head around to me so fast, I thought it would just keep going in circles on her neck.

"What are you, a scholarship winner or something? Is that why you're here?"

I stared, confused.

"Hardly," I finally replied. "My uncle and aunt arranged all this without telling me anything about it. I was drugged, kidnapped, and brought here."

Robin started to laugh and stopped. "Did you say drugged and kidnapped?"

"I know exactly what she means. That's how I felt," Teal said. "My father arranged for me to be transported here. He was nice enough to tell me I was going to a special school, but my parents didn't even let me take a change of clothing. Daddy had a hired goon bring me to the airport and to the plane. Next thing I knew, I was flying away and no one told me where I was going. They kept the windows shut, too. They gave me something to drink, and before I knew it, I was asleep, so I was drugged, too. When I woke up, I was here and dressed in this rag and these stupid clodhoppers as well as this...diaper."

"I guess I shouldn't have expected anything better from my aunt, but why did your father do that to you?" I asked. Even though I had had some of my things when Daddy brought me to live with Aunt Mae Louise and Uncle Buster, I didn't feel much different except I knew why they'd got rid of me. There was no surprise for me there.

"He was, I guess I can safely say, at the end of his patience with me. I was an embarrassment to my mother, who sits at the head of the social table of high society."

"What did you do?"

"I robbed a bank," Teal muttered.

"What?"

"I stole money from Daddy's secret safe, his and my brother Carson's."

"And your own father sent you away for that?"

"Well, it was a little more, I guess," Teal admitted.

"I bet," Robin muttered. "Don't be fooled by her sweet little face."

I turned to her. "What about you?"

"I didn't rob a bank, but I was part of an armed robbery of a supermarket where I worked," Robin said, looking ahead. It was as if she were reminding herself and not telling us. "This is supposed to be an alternative to going to a real jail. My mother darling talked me into it, and like both of you, I was eventually put in a plane and the same things happened to me. I fell asleep and they took my clothing and brought me here."

She smiled and shook her head and then shouted at the closed door, "They're just trying to frighten us with all this...this horror-hotel stuff, but it doesn't scare me! Y'all just wasting your time! You might as well give me back my clothes!"

"What brought you here?" Teal asked me after Robin's screams died down.

"I ran away from my uncle and aunt where I was supposed to stay."

"So, big deal," Robin said. "I bet we've all done that one time or another."

"I was supposed to be in court for hitting this boy with a little brass statue."

"Did you kill him?" Teal asked, her eyes widening with interest.

"No, but I put him in the hospital. He was part of a group of boys trying to rape me."

"So why would they put you in jail for that?" Robin asked skeptically. "It just sounds like self-defense to me."

"There's more to it."

"I bet."

"Look," I said, turning on her, "I don't have to defend myself to you. In fact -- "

Before I could say anything else, we heard the door squeal open, followed by the machine-gun *rat-ta-tat-tat* of stiletto high heels on the concrete floor.

Out of the dark shadows came a tall, elegant-looking woman, statuesque with a firm figure in a ruby-red skirt suit. She had highlighted golden brown hair, about the base of her neck in length, neatly styled. As she moved more into the light and drew closer, I saw she was an attractive woman with high cheekbones and a perfect nose. She was wearing a soft red lipstick, very understated. A girlfriend of mine, Louella Mason, who was determined to become a beautician, had told me when a woman wants to emphasize her eyes, she de-emphasizes her lips, but this woman looked like she didn't need anything special to make her eyes prominent. They weren't big as much as they were striking and intense.

She paused, looked at the three of us, and smiled so warmly, I felt like getting up and rushing into her arms. It was a smile that brought a ray of sunshine to a rainy day, and, boy, did I need some sugar now.

"Hello, girls," she said. "I'm Dr. Foreman. Welcome to my school."

"This is a school?" Teal piped up immediately. "It's more like someone's filthy basement."

Dr. Foreman turned to her and, holding her smile, said, "No, this isn't the actual school." She looked about and smiled as if she didn't see what we saw. She saw a beautiful lobby or something instead. "This is my orientation center. The school is some distance from here, but I like to meet my girls as soon as they are brought and introduce them to the way things will be as soon as possible. That way, if they don't accept what I say and don't do what I say, I can put them right back on the plane and ship them somewhere else where a far worse fate awaits them. Is this plan all right with you, Teal?"

I could see Teal was both impressed and intimidated that Dr. Foreman already knew which of us she was. Teal didn't answer. She just sat looking at her, her mouth slightly open. Dr. Foreman did not turn away immediately either. She held Teal's gaze, froze that now cold smile on her lips, and only after a few beats, slowly turned back to Robin and me.

"Now then, as I was saying, welcome to my school," she continued.

As if that was their cue, three young women, the one who had escorted me from the plane to the concrete building, and two others dressed similarly with their hair cut identically short, entered and took position just behind Dr. Foreman. They stood with military posture, their arms behind them, hands clasped, and looked forward, not at us, just forward and poised like guard dogs ready to pounce upon command. Foreman's rottweilers, all teeth and muscle, I thought.

"I created my school only five years ago, but I have, shall we say, graduated dozens of girls like you, releasing them back into society as productive young women, all of whom have kept out of any trouble with their families or with the law. Three are in fact law officers now themselves," Dr. Foreman said, smiling wider with pride. "Two are correction officers and one is a policewoman in a big city."

"Something for us to look forward to," Robin muttered. "A career as a policewoman."

Dr. Foreman looked straight ahead, but her body began to turn as if it were robotic, slowly, stiffly, her shoulders firm and straight.

"Right now, Robin Lyn Taylor, all you have to look forward to is getting yourself into more trouble and so deeply that you are eventually put away in a room without any hope of getting out. In effect, you have no future. The reason you have been sent here is to help you regain one. Until that happens, you, all of you," Dr. Foreman said, looking at Teal and me as well now, "are nonentities. You don't exist for your families. You don't exist for yourselves. All you've accomplished up until now is sharpened yourselves as thorns in the side of civilized society. With me, under my care, you will either develop the ability to have a future or you will be pulled out of the side of the civilized world and discarded like any nuisance. The choice is ultimately yours to make, but," she said, smiling warmly again, "we will do our best here to help you make the right choice. In the past, whenever you were given the opportunity to do what was right and decent, you all made other choices. We expect to correct that. We will help you.

"Someone, thanks to the mercy of our court system, has decided to give you this one last chance. Rather than sit here sulking and trying to think of wisecracks, you should begin to show some appreciation.

"But," she continued in a sweet, melodic tone, "I am the first to recognize that you are all here because you are all filled with defiance, anger, and most of all fear."

"Fear?" I muttered. I couldn't help it. It just slipped out between my lips. How could fear have brought us here?

"Yes, my dear Phoebe, fear. Antisocial behavior stems from a well of fear. You act out because you are defensive, slightly paranoid, I'm afraid. In your present way of thinking, the world around you threatens you. You believe everyone is against you and you're just naturally antagonistic to everything."

I guess she saw the lack of understanding in my face. She smiled, again so softly, I felt I could relax and listen to her for hours.

"Don't worry about any of that yet, my dear. You'll see. You'll all see. That's what's so wonderful about my work," she said excitedly, "at least to me, especially the way it opens the eyes of my girls. For me," she said, her voice rising an octave, "there is nothing as satisfying as seeing one of my girls suddenly come to the realization she can be as good as anyone else out there, she can be productive and worthwhile. She can make friends and be liked and like others. Her heart can hold sunshine, even on rainy days."

She did make it sound wonderful. For a moment she paused with her face so radiant and full of happiness, I felt some hope seep into my hardened and crusty surface. She looked at me as if she could sense it and gave me a special nod, a little more of her smile.

"People are always asking me, 'Dr. Foreman, you were a successful and renowned college professor. Why did you throw away your classroom work, your publications, your lectures, put all your fortune into this school, and go off and surround yourself with the hardest sort of challenge: girls whom everyone has given up on, girls who would easily end up in penal institutions?'"

"Well, the answer is you, my dears," she declared with her arms out as though she were about to embrace all three of us at once, "you and your awakening. Nothing is more satisfying to me than to bring someone back from the dead," she continued, her right hand over her heart, "for that is where you are now, in some cemetery of your own making, burying yourselves in your disgust, your fears, your dysfunction."

She grew stern looking again and took another step toward the three of us.

"Within the next twenty-four hours, fourteen hundred teenagers like yourselves will attempt suicide, twenty-eight hundred will get pregnant, fifteen thousand will try alcohol for the first time, and thirty-five hundred will run away from home."

She let those facts linger in the air between us for a moment. I glanced at Robin and then Teal. Neither seemed impressed nor seemed to care.

"But not you. No, not my girls. To me," Dr. Foreman said, looking up at the ceiling as if she could look right through to the heavens, "you will all be like Lazarus, rising from the grave."

"Does that mean you're God?" Teal asked, her mouth dripping with sarcasm.

I thought I was brave and tough, but this soft, pretty white girl who sounded like she had been born with a silver spoon in her mouth was sure nasty and unafraid, even after all that had been done to her, to us.

Dr. Foreman's eyelids fluttered. She had what seemed unflappable poise. That smile never faltered as she lowered her gaze at Teal like someone lowering the barrel of a cannon at a new target.

"For you and for the others, dear Teal, as long as you are here, that is exactly who I will be."

She waited a moment for her words to settle. Teal shook her head and looked away.

"Now," Dr. Foreman said, turning back to speak to all of us, "let me begin by explaining that you're not going to a school any way like the ones you have attended. First, my school is at my ranch. It's a working ranch and you will all participate in the daily chores."

"Oh, so we're really a form of cheap labor, is that it?" Robin complained.

"Hardly cheap, Robin. For your work, you will be given full room and board."

"Isn't my father paying you?" Teal fired at her. "I shouldn't have to do any daily chores," she declared staunchly, her eyes burning with arrogance.

"Yes, in your case, the family is paying, but there is much more that will be given to you than you would get anywhere else for that amount of money," Dr. Foreman said calmly. The arrows and darts Teal shot at her with those fiery eyes seemed to bounce off an invisible wall of protection that surrounded her.

"Like what?" Teal demanded, refusing to step back. I saw how the girls behind Dr. Foreman glared at Teal. They all looked eager to get their hands around her neck and shake her head off her body.

"Like my expert treatment, my therapy sessions, my proven techniques," Dr. Foreman said to all of us and not just Teal. "It's off the charts when you start computing the costs, and even Teal here, who points out that her parents are paying the tuition, couldn't really afford the tuition if it were equated with the value you will all receive."

"Why are you so nice and generous to us?" Teal muttered, the corners of her mouth folding in.

"Why? I do this because I want to give back to the science that has been so good to me, as well as my deep desire to help young women in desperate need, to help them find what is spiritually good in them."

"Oh, brother," Teal muttered. "We're in a nunnery."

Dr. Foreman's rottweilers moved restlessly. She glanced at them and turned back to us.

"To continue" -- Dr. Foreman glared at Teal -- "at my school you will not find a staff of teachers to coddle and prod you into doing your homework, studying properly, and achieving. I will assign you all your work and you will have to master it all yourselves."

"Huh?" Robin said. "Did you say ourselves?"

"What are we going to study, basket weaving?" Teal asked with a crooked smile.

"You will be studying regular academic subjects, of course. We want you to qualify for high school graduation, to be able to pass exams, even be good enough to be admitted to institutions of higher learning, but you will be in a different sort of classroom. Life itself, you will see, will become the chief subject. You're all failing at that right now, and for now, that is far more important a subject than anything else."

"I don't get it. How are we supposed to learn anything without a teacher?" Robin asked. "It was hard enough to learn with one."

"Oh, you'll be surprised at what you can accomplish when you are left to your own initiative, Robin Lyn. Of course, you will all help each other. Cooperation in that regard is very important. I will want you all to fully understand how important it is to get along with each other, with others of different backgrounds. Out there, that's what you must do to be a contributing member of society.

"But, self-reliance is essential, too. We can cooperate with each other, but we can't become totally dependent upon others or we become a burden, don't we? That is truly what the three of you are right now, a burden.

You'll either be cast off or you'll learn to walk on your own. Sink or swim," she said, her face now turning cool. When she called for it, that iciness seemed to emerge from within her, rise to the surface of her face, penetrate her eyes, tighten her lips, and make her look taller, more intimidating.

I glanced again at the other two. Despite the brave fronts they were putting on, I sensed they were just as anxious about all this as I was. I noticed as well that the three young women behind Dr. Foreman had grown still again, had barely moved a muscle since she had looked at them. How could they be so disciplined? They were three statues.

How much longer would we be kept here? I wondered. It was dank and musty, the air so stale my throat ached. Why did we have to begin in such a place anyway? The stool was uncomfortable. The lighting was dull. What was the point of having us sit at old grade-school desks? I was still tired and achy from my unpleasant trip. I couldn't wait to go to sleep in a bed and I had to go to the bathroom, but I was afraid to mention it yet. I didn't want to be the first one.

"To be sure you are making the right amount of effort at your schoolwork, you will be tested from time to time on your academic subjects, and if you don't pass, you will be given demerits," Dr. Foreman explained.

"Demerits?" Teal said, smirking. "What does that mean, we won't get our Girl Scout patches and medals?"

"No, my dear," Dr. Foreman responded. "Nothing that important. You are all as of now under my merit system. Since you have all been brought here as a last resort because of your antisocial behavior, you will all be beginning with a minus ten and have to work your way back up to zero before you can even hope to achieve rights and privileges."

That did sound threatening.

"What rights and privileges?" I asked.

"Well, for one thing, you will have to wear what you're wearing until you achieve the points to wear my school uniforms."

"What are we wearing? This is disgusting," Teal complained. "Not only are these...these rags irritating my skin, they smell, and why do we have to wear diapers, for Christ sakes? I want my clothes back."

"Yes, I'm sorry about these transitional outfits. They do have that unpleasant odor." Dr. Foreman sounded sympathetic. She also made it sound as if there were no other choice. I finally saw the three rottweilers soften their lips into a smile.

"But why are we wearing diapers?" Robin asked.

"Because, my dear, you are being reborn. Unfortunately, none of you have shown enough maturity to be considered anything but infants, and until you do, that's how you will be treated," Dr. Foreman said firmly, losing the smile. Then she blossomed into another to add, "Believe me, my dear, you'll be grateful you have them on."

The slight smiles on the three young women behind her widened almost into laughter when she said that.

"That's cold," Teal said. "And disgusting. I feel like some old lady with bladder trouble. I want my clothing

back. They were expensive, especially the designer jeans. You have no right to take them away from me. Why can't we all have our clothes back?" she whined, now sounding more like a spoiled child than a defiant teenager.

"I've already given that answer. One thing you will learn and learn very quickly here, Teal, is if I or anyone else has to repeat something to you, it's because you don't or won't listen, and that will result in a demerit."

"I don't care about any demerits. I want my clothing!" Teal shouted back. Her voice echoed off the cement walls and then died as if her words were smashed to bits, the letters splattered and then raining down to the dank concrete floor.

Dr. Foreman took a step toward her. "Oh, but you will care, my dear. That will be one of the significant changes in you very soon," she said slowly, her voice so full of chill, I imagined the words turning to ice in the air between them. Even the cold smile disappeared.

"I want to go home," Teal cried back at her. "Right now."

"Do you? Unfortunately for you, for all of you, no one wants you back, Teal. In fact, I'm the only one who wants you."

"How long do I have to stay here, live on your ranch, and milk cows or whatever?" Teal was definitely someone who couldn't stand being bossed around.

"That's entirely up to you," Dr. Foreman replied. "Now then, there will be no more questions." She turned to Robin and me. "No more questions from any of you. You will all just listen and you will do what you are told to do. Listen well, girls," she added, her cold smile returning to those lips. "Be keen, girls, be keen. Your comfort and happiness depend on it like they never have before."

She stepped back, glanced at the young women behind her, who looked excited about her firmness. I wouldn't admit it, of course, but they frightened me. I wondered if Robin's and Teal's hearts were pounding as hard as mine was now, despite the brave face masks they wore.

We were all brought here more or less against our will. Dr. Foreman was probably not wrong about that. We had no one out there to help us, no one to call, no one to come for us. I couldn't help feeling that I was dangling in space, holding on to a thin piece of spidery web that this strange woman, sometimes sounding nice, sometimes sounding scary, held at the other end. If she decided to let go, I, as well as Robin and Teal, would fall into some darker place. What else could we do but listen?

"Now, so there are no misunderstandings and no whining like we're hearing," Dr. Foreman said, glaring at Teal again, "let me be clear about what you should expect after you leave here. At my home you will find there are no radios, no magazines, no CDs, and especially no television for anyone until she has earned the right to leisure time. The only books permitted are the books related to your subjects, not that any of you look like you read very much," she added with a tightening at the right corner of her mouth.

"No one will have any phone privileges until she earns twenty merit plus points. That means no one can call you as well -- not, from what I know of each of your histories, that anyone would want to call you."

"We really are like prisoners," Teal complained, and quickly looked down.

"Since that wasn't put in the form of a question, I will let it pass without penalizing you another demerit. If you are like prisoners, as you say, it's because you have imprisoned yourselves. You have put bars on your own windows and built the walls between yourselves and the rest of humanity. I am your best hope to remove those bars, to crumble those walls. Right now, you see me only as a disciplinarian, but in time, very soon, you will learn to appreciate what I have to offer you.

"It's a lot like Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller," she said, looking off. She smiled at some image of herself, and even that smile was disturbing enough to make my stomach feel as if I had just drunk a gallon of sour milk. "For in truth, you all can't really speak, can't really hear, can't really see. You're locked up inside your own troubled bodies, and I will free you. Yes, I will."

There was a long silence. My throat was dry. My stomach continued to churn and I felt the growing pressure of having to go to the bathroom. I trembled, but I had to ask. I raised my hand, hoping she would permit it.

"I said no questions," she declared.

"But..."

She raised her head and the very air seemed to freeze around us. If I uttered another sound, lightning might sizzle my brain, I thought. I bit down on my lower lip. She smiled again.

"I don't want to leave you thinking that all that awaits you is hard work, rules, and restrictions. We will have wonderful sessions together, my group therapy, during which time you will all have this, this terribly dark curtain of pain and anger lifted from your eyes. Believe me, girls, that will happen and you will be grateful. I've seen it so many times before on the faces of my girls. My girls," she repeated, her eyes glossing over as if she could see them all parading before her, hugging her like high school graduates at their diploma ceremony.

She was quiet again. We could hear a drip, drip, drip of something in the plumbing above and behind us. Her eyes slowly brightened, the gloss changing to a thin layer of ice. She stared at us so long, I felt uncomfortable and saw both Teal and Robin squirming a bit on their stools as well.

"Part of your work and your life at my school will be your confronting your own fears. One of the best ways to do that is to be out in nature. Nature has a way of tearing away all the conflicting, confusing things that have distorted our vision of ourselves. In nature you can make no rationalizations, no excuses, fall upon your knees and beg for mercy. You either become strong or perish. Everything out there teaches us that lesson and it's a wonderful lesson, one that we tend to forget in the world we call civilized. We'll help you regain that wisdom. Or, I should say, nature will."

Nature? I thought. What was she talking about, camping trips? Sleeping in a tent? Maybe Teal wasn't so off. Maybe this was like the Girl Scouts.

"Now then," Dr. Foreman said, pulling herself up and stepping back. "Unfortunately, I must conclude our little talk with a severe warning. Any signs of insubordination, even nasty looks and evidence of an attitude, will result in demerits. Profanity will be punished severely. If any of you get two demerits in one day, or fall two points or more below the minus ten I have generously given you, or finally do something so terrible that it is off the charts, she will be sent to our Ice Room to chill out, as you kids like to say these days."

Ice Room? What was that?

She looked around the cement room, once again as if she could hear my thoughts. "This place is a first-class hotel room compared to our Ice Room." She didn't make it sound like a threat either, but it clearly put the shivers into Teal and Robin as quickly as it did in me. Not describing it any further left it to each of our imaginations, and I was sure we each came up with our worst fears.

"And now, my dears," she said again, sounding as if we were all at a grand tea party, "it's time for you to be introduced to your buddies. They are three of my graduates, three of whom I am very, very proud. They have earned the right to assist me."

The girls beamed with joy at her compliments and gazed at her adoringly. I didn't know why yet, but it made my nerve endings sizzle to see the way they all looked up to her. I had the feeling she could ask one or all of them to open their wrists, and they would instantly obey.

As Dr. Foreman continued, she looked at them with a mother's pride. "I call them your buddies because they are here to give you the benefit of their experience. They will be in charge of your daily life, your daily development, and since they have experienced my school firsthand, they have real insight into what goes on in a new girl's mind. Depend on them, listen to them, and most of all, obey them."

She turned back to us. "Even though they are your buddies, you are to treat them as respectfully and obediently as you would me. In order to establish that, and to help you understand how far they have grown and what they have become now, you are to address them only as *m'lady*, for that is truly who they are, ladies."

Teal couldn't help a guffaw, her laughter spurting out of her lips like something she was unable to keep from coming up. It was like a small explosion.

"If you don't tighten your lips this instant," Dr. Foreman snarled at her, "you'll be starting at a minus fifteen with the Ice Room as your initiation to my school."

Teal's smile evaporated.

After a long silence, Dr. Foreman stepped to the side and introduced M'Lady One, who was the young woman who had escorted me off the plane. She stepped forward and waited, still at attention. M'Lady Two, who stepped up beside her, was a far more attractive woman with light brown hair, a perfect nose, and a far more feminine mouth. She wasn't as tall, perhaps only five feet five, but because of her firm military posture, she didn't look much shorter. She had a nice figure, well proportioned, that couldn't be disguised even in the blah uniform.

M'Lady Three was the stoutest and shortest. I thought she was barely five feet tall. She had shoulders like a football player and hard, sharply cut facial features. Her dark eyes were too far apart and her short, dull brown hair was trimmed farther back on her forehead than that of the other two. When she opened her mouth, I saw she had crooked teeth, especially on the bottom.

"A new student does nothing without permission until she is told she may do so," M'Lady One recited.

M'Lady Two continued, "That means even going to the bathroom. A new student does not speak unless given permission to do so."

M'Lady Three picked up immediately when M'Lady Two stopped. She had the deepest, coarsest voice. "A

new student learns that in the real world nothing comes to you because it's supposed to come to you. You earn everything; you are entitled to nothing. This is reality. Therefore, we will have reality checks periodically to determine whether or not you have earned what you want, what you have."

"This means everything," they all recited. They spoke like some chorus that had performed these speeches many, many times, all speaking without much emotion, except for the underlying and continuous threat.

"A new student knows that complaints earn demerits. Cheating, laziness, slacking off, any of that earns demerits," M'Lady Two said.

"And demerits put you in the Ice Room," they all chorused.

"Thank you, m'ladies," Dr. Foreman said. They looked at her as if they were desperate for approval, then they stepped back.

I raised my hand and she looked at me so long, I thought she was going to simply ignore it. Finally, she asked me what I wanted.

"I need to go to the bathroom," I said.

The three buddies smiled simultaneously as if they were of one face.

"After all this, that is what you ask? Have you heard nothing?"

"But I need to go," I cried, now unashamed to admit it.

"Your needs are no longer what is of primary importance. We are now going to think first of the group's needs."

"But..."

"You're here because you are selfish, and that will be the first demon we will destroy. I promise you that," Dr. Foreman said. "Now then, I have one more request of you all that you must fulfill before we can go any further."

She turned to the buddies and each stepped forward, M'Lady One coming to me, M'Lady Two going to Robin, and M'Lady Three to Teal. They handed each of us a small composition notebook and a pen.

"What is this?" Teal muttered. "Homework, already?"

"That's a demerit," Dr. Foreman said, pointing at her with a long, thin finger. "You didn't have permission to speak. One more and you're in the Ice Room."

Teal looked away. I could see, however, that she was fighting back tears, tears of rage and fear.

"Now then," Dr. Foreman said, "as a second part of your orientation, I want each of you to write her story. Tell me everything you can about yourself, what you remember as a child, where you lived, the friends you had or thought you had, the teachers you remember. I am very interested in how you see yourself, what you expect you will eventually do with your life. I want the notebooks filled with details, exact details of every

thing you remember as important to you. I am particularly interested in your fears, so I want you to give lots of thought to that. All of us, including me, have something we fear. It's natural or, perhaps, it's something we have inherited or developed because of who we are, where we have lived, whom we have known. Don't dare leave that out.

"If you lie and I find out you have lied in this introductory history, you will be fined ten full demerit points. Remember, I know much about you. This is both a test of your veracity and a chance for you to think about yourselves."

We looked at each other in disbelief. Write our histories? Surely, this was a joke.

"I see you are not taking me seriously," Dr. Foreman said. "I assure you that you will all remain here until you are all finished. Until then, no one will get anything to drink or eat, nor will anyone" -- she centered on me -- "use the bathroom. That's academic anyway since there is no bathroom," she added dryly.

I felt my face flush. No bathroom? Reminding me I had to go built the pressure inside me. I felt myself breaking out into a sweat, my heart pounding. Didn't the other two have to go? If they did, they didn't show it.

"Finally, let me remind you that no one is to speak to anyone during this exercise. One of your buddies will monitor you, and should anyone speak, you will all remain here one hour longer for every word uttered."

Then, as suddenly as she finished speaking, she smiled warmly at us and in loving tones said, "Welcome, girls. Welcome to my school. I truly hope this will be a lifesaving experience for you all."

With that she turned and walked out, her heels clicking and echoing around us until she was gone and it was deadly silent.

It was as if all clocks had stopped. Nothing beat anymore.

Not even our own hearts.

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